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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study involving well-educated first-generation Chinese American and European American parents and their children explored the parents' involvement in their children' schooling in the primary school years. This paper is based on data collected at Time 3 (1997). At Time 1 (1993), 40 Chinese American and 40 European American preschool and kindergarten children and their parents from the Chicago (Illinois) area participated. Ninety-four and 91% of the original families participated at Time 2 (1995) and Time 3. To determine the relative contribution of three types of parent involvement (engagement in school activities, personal involvement, and cognitive-intellectual involvement) to the child's school performance and liking of school, multiple regressions were performed. For Chinese American children, 37% of the variance in their school performance was predicted by their parents' involvement variables, with cognitive-intellectual involvement the most important contributor to school performance. Personal involvement also predicted school performance. For European American students, 11% of the variance in the child's school performance ratings was predicted by the parent involvement variables, and 25% of the child's liking of school subjects was predicted by the block of parent involvement activities. Parent involvement of the cognitive-intellectual type appears to be more important than parent involvement in school activities in the academic success of both Chinese American and European American students, but parent involvement in school activities directly influenced the European American child's liking of school subjects. (Contains 2 figures, 4 tables, and 8 references.) (SLD)

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Parental Involvement in Children's Schooling: Different Meanings in Different Cultures

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Introduction

In the United States there has been an emphasis recently on parental involvement in children's education (Berger, 1995). Greater parental involvement is related to higher child achievement (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) have defined parent involvement as "the dedication of resources by the parent to the child in a specific domain." Their multidimensional model of parent involvement included the following categories: parent behavior (participating in school activities), personal involvement (child's affective environment), and cognitive/intellectual involvement (exposing the child to cognitively stimulating activities). This model was derived from and tested with white middle-class families. Because the school population in the United States is culturally diverse, it is important to also explore the issue of parent involvement in minority groups. Some of the highest achievers in United States schools are Chinese American children. Do Chinese American parents manifest their involvement in school in the same ways as white parents? Teaching their children (the cognitive-intellectual dimension) has traditionally been a very important role for Chinese parents (Ho, 1994), but an historically new role for United States parents (Lareau, 1987). Chinese parents do not typically seek frequent personal interaction with the teacher (Stevenson et al., 1990), while parents in the United States often do. Our longitudinal study, involving well-educated first-generation Chinese American and European American parents and their children, explored the parents' involvement in their children's schooling over the primary school years. This paper is based on data collected at Time 3 (1997).

Method

Sample

At Time 1 (1993), 40 Chinese American and 40 European American preschool and kindergarten children and their mothers and fathers from the suburban Chicago region participated. Ninety-four percent (N = 76) and ninety-one percent (N = 73) of the original families participated at Times 2 (1995) and 3 (1997), respectively. (See Table 1 for specific characteristics.)

Measures

Parent involvement in school activities. Fathers and mothers completed an 8-item scale regarding their involvement in school activities (see Table 2 for specific items). Summary scores of paternal and maternal involvement in school activities were obtained by adding all eight ratings for each father and mother.

Personal involvement. Mothers and fathers independently rated themselves on 14 items taken from the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) (Rohner, 1984) assessing the concept of parental acceptance. Items are rated on a 4-point scale with 1 representing "almost never true" and 4 representing "almost always true." Sample items include "I make my child feel proud when s/he does well," and "I make my child feel what s/he does is important." Internal consistency of the scale in this study was good (α = .84 for CA mothers, .61 for EA mothers, .76 for CA fathers, and .75 for EA fathers).

Cognitive-intellectual involvement. Parents were interviewed jointly in their homes. Parents were asked the following question used in this study: "How do you facilitate your child's development in mathematics (reading)?" Two master lists were compiled from all the ways parents said they facilitated mathematics (reading). The first author and a college early childhood education instructor independently rated each item on the master lists on a 3-point Likert type scale, where 1 indicated indirect, informal, spontaneous, play-oriented methods, and 3 indicated formal, direct, systematic, work-oriented methods. High interrater agreement (kappa = .83) was achieved. A mean informality-formality index was created for each mathematics and reading methods by coding each method parents had named with 1, 2, or 3 and finding the arithmetic average of the sum. The resulting variables were called mathematics teaching methods and reading teaching methods.

Two items involving homework were taken from the parent questionnaire: (1) "How much daily homework does your child's teacher assign in each specific area [reading, spelling, mathematics, writing, social studies, science]?" (2) Do you and your spouse give your child any additional homework? If so, indicate the total amount of parent-assigned homework per day in each area. Response choices for both questions were as follows: none, 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15

minutes, 20 minutes, 25+ minutes. Teacher-assigned and parent- assigned homework were summed for each mathematics and reading. The mathematics and reading teaching methods variables and the mathematics and reading homework time variables were standardized and combined into the cognitive-intellectual involvement variable.

Child's school performance. Because most of the children had not yet received traditional ABC grades on their report cards, we asked teachers, "How well does this child do in the following subject areas?" (reading, science, mathematics, spelling, writing, social studies, art, and gym). Ratings were given on a 4-point scale (1 = not so well, 2 = somewhat well, 3 = moderately well, 4 = very well). We averaged the ratings from the 8 school subject areas for the child's overall school performance rating.

Child's liking of school. Two measures assessed the child's liking of school. First, parents were asked, "How characteristic of your child is each of the following descriptors? [likes school; talks positively about her/his teacher; comes home from school happy; cannot wait for vacations to end; and eager to go to school in the morning]. Ratings were made on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represented "not characteristic" and 5 represented "very characteristic."

Second, children were asked how much they liked the following school subjects: reading, science, math, spelling, writing, social studies, art, and gym. Responses were made using a 4-point scale (1=do not like; 2 = like a little, 3=like moderately, 4 = like a lot). The children's responses over the eight school subjects were averaged. This variable, called child's liking of school subjects, was used in the regressions reported later.

Procedure

Parents were informed about the Time 3 data collection by letter and follow-up telephone calls. After parents returned the consent forms, they were contacted by telephone to schedule appointments for the home interview. Children were assessed individually by the first author in quiet rooms at their schools. Eight-page questionnnaires were mailed to the mothers and fathers of the children. Completed questionnaires were picked up at the time of the parent interview.

Questionnaires assessing the child's behavior in school were given to teachers to complete and return by mail.

Results

Analysis of Variance Results

Parent involvement in school activities. Two 2 (ethnic group) x 2 (gender of child) multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were performed on the parent involvement in school activities scale. A multivariate main effect for ethnic group indicated that European American mothers participated to a greater extent than did Chinese American mothers, $F(8, 60) = 3.80$, $p < .001$. European American fathers also were found to participate to a greater extent than Chinese American fathers, $F(8, 61) = 6.08$, $p < .0001$ (see Table 2 for univariate differences).

Personal involvement. Two x 2 ANOVAs revealed that European American mothers rated themselves higher on acceptance than did Chinese American mothers, $F(1, 68) = 13.80$, $p < .0001$ (see Figure 1). Similar results were obtained for fathers, $F(1,68) = 6.08$, $p < .05$.

Cognitive/intellectual involvement. ANOVAs revealed that Chinese-American parents ($M = 2.43$) provided more formal instruction in mathematics than did European American parents ($M = 1.96$), $F(1, 72) = 27.67$, $p < .0001$. No ethnic group differences were found for reading teaching methods. Chinese American parents reported their children spent a greater amount of time on mathematics ($M = 19.60$ min.) and reading ($M = 24.31$ min.) homework than did European American children ($Ms = 13.19$ and 19.03 minutes, respectively), $Fs(1, 70) = 6.28, 3.22$, $ps < .01, .08$. Eighty-nine percent of Chinese American children and 45% of European American children were taking music lessons. Fifty-one percent of Chinese American children and eight percent of European American children played two instruments, typically piano and violin.

Child's school performance. A 2 x 2 MANOVA performed on teacher ratings of children's school performance showed that teachers rated Chinese American children as doing better than European American children in reading, mathematics, spelling, writing, and social studies,

whereas, European American children were rated as more skilled in gym, F (8, 60) = 2.64, p = .015. Children from both groups were rated as similar in science and art (see Figure 2).

Three gender differences emerged. Girls (Ms = 3.78, 3.70, 3.70) were rated as performing better than boys (Ms = 3.47, 3.28, 3.34) in reading, F (1, 67)= 6.93, $p < .01$; writing, F (1, 67) = 6.92, $p < .01$; and art F (1,67) = 6.13, $p < .05$, respectively.

Child's liking of school. A 2 x 2 MANOVA performed on the 5 items in the parent's report of their child's liking of school showed that Chinese American children had a greater liking for school, F (5, 65) = 2.36, $p < .05$. Another MANOVA revealed a marginally significant difference for the child's report of how much s/he liked school subjects. Chinese American children reported liking school subjects (M = 3.29) somewhat better than did the European American children (M = 3.10), F (2, 69) = 2.85, $p < .10$. (See Table 3 for univariate differences.)

Regression Results

To determine the relative contribution of the three types of parent involvement to the child's school performance and liking of school, we performed a series of multiple regressions. Because mothers' and fathers' involvement variables were not correlated for the European American families, we chose to look at the contributions of mothers' and fathers' involvement separately. We also examined ethnic groups separately. Because regression results for mothers and fathers separately within the same ethnic group were virtually identical, we aggregated the mothers' and fathers' acceptance variables and involvement variables to simplify the presentation. We entered the three types of involvement (involvement in school activities, personal involvement, and cognitive-intellectual involvement) as a block on the two outcome variables of child's school performance and child's liking of school subjects.

For Chinese American children, 37% of the variance in their school performance was predicted by their parents' involvement variables (see Table 4). Beta weights indicate that the parents' cognitive-intellectual involvement was the most important contributor to school performance. The more formal and systematic the parents' teaching and the more time the child spent on homework, the higher their child's school performance. Personal involvement (parental

acceptance) also predicted school performance. The more accepting Chinese American parents were, the higher the teacher rated their child's school performance. The child's liking of school was not predicted by any of the parent involvement variables.

For European Americans, 11% of the variance in the child's school performance ratings was predicted by the parent involvement variables. Beta weights indicate that the only type of parent involvement which predicted school performance was cognitive-intellectual involvement. Children whose parents taught them in more formal ways and who spent more time on homework received higher school performance ratings.

For European Americans, 25% of the child's liking of school subjects was predicted by the block of parent involvement variables. Beta weights indicate that the parents' greater involvement in school activities significantly predicted the child's greater liking of school subjects.

Parent involvement of the cognitive-intellectual type appears to be more important than parent involvement in school activities in the academic success of both Chinese American and European American children. However, parent involvement in school activities directly influenced the European American child's liking of school subjects. It may be that parent involvement in school activities indirectly influences the child's academic success through increasing the child's liking of school subjects.

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Table 1

Sample Demographics at Time 3

	Chinese American			European American		
	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.
Age of child		9.75	.34		9.70	.32
Boys in sample	17			18		
Girls in sample	18			20		
Number of children in family		2.21	.55		2.41	.71
Mother's age		41.38	2.88		40.88	4.40
Father's age		43.77	3.09		43.62	4.84
Mother's educational attainment		16.73	1.94		17.18	1.32
Father's educational attainment		18.23	2.21		17.68	1.81
Hollingshead (1975) status score		59.83	6.81		60.77	4.63

Note. There are no significant differences on any of the sample characteristics.

Table 2

Cultural Differences in Parents' Participation in School Activities

	Mothers			Fathers		
	Chinese American	European American		Chinese American	European American	
Parent Involvement	Mean	Mean	F	Mean	Mean	F
Contributes materials to classroom	1.79	2.16	5.55*	1.68	1.43	3.44†
Helps teacher prepare materials for class use	1.18	1.24	.21	1.11	1.11	.81
Volunteers in the classroom	1.53	2.00	6.65*	1.12	1.36	5.45*
Chaperones on field trips	1.41	1.73	4.53*	1.29	1.16	1.20
Serves on school committees	1.24	1.92	13.96***	1.12	1.29	1.86
Attends open houses regularly	2.60	2.81	2.69	2.29	2.95	20.07***
Attends parent-teacher conferences	2.89	3.00	4.80*	2.53	2.89	7.26**
Talks informally with the teacher	2.11	2.68	17.51***	1.76	2.16	6.15*
Summary score	14.75	17.54		12.90	14.35	

Notes. Items were rated on a 3-point scale where 1 represents "don't do," 2 represents "sometimes do," and 3 represents "regularly do."

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Table 3

Ethnic Group and Gender Differences in Children's Liking of School

	Chinese American		European American		Gender	Ethnic Group
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	F	F
Parent report of child's liking of school‡						
Likes school	4.78	4.29	4.65	4.18	8.29**	N.S.
Talks positively about the teacher	4.39	4.12	4.35	4.35	N.S.	N.S.
Comes home from school happy	4.67	4.47	4.35	4.18	N.S.	4.17*
Can't wait for vacations to end	3.11	2.82	2.30	2.24	N.S.	6.67*
Eager to go to school	4.17	3.82	3.95	3.65	N.S.	N.S.
Child's report of liking of school subjects±						
Reading	3.72	3.24	2.95	2.61	4.23*	12.39***
Science	3.11	3.29	3.05	2.72	N.S.	N.S.
Mathematics	3.00	3.53	3.20	3.56	4.92†	N.S.
Spelling	3.17	2.94	3.10	3.00	N.S.	N.S.
Writing	3.28	2.76	2.90	2.56	3.50†	N.S.
Social Studies	2.89	2.88	2.90	2.72	N.S.	N.S.
Art	3.89	3.47	3.75	3.33	3.18*	N.S.
Gym	3.44	3.94	3.25	3.89	12.44***	N.S.

Notes. ‡Items were rated on a 5-point scale where 1 represents "not characteristic" and 5 represents "very characteristic." ± Items were rated on a 4-point scale where 1 represents "do not like" and 4 represents "like a lot."

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Table 4

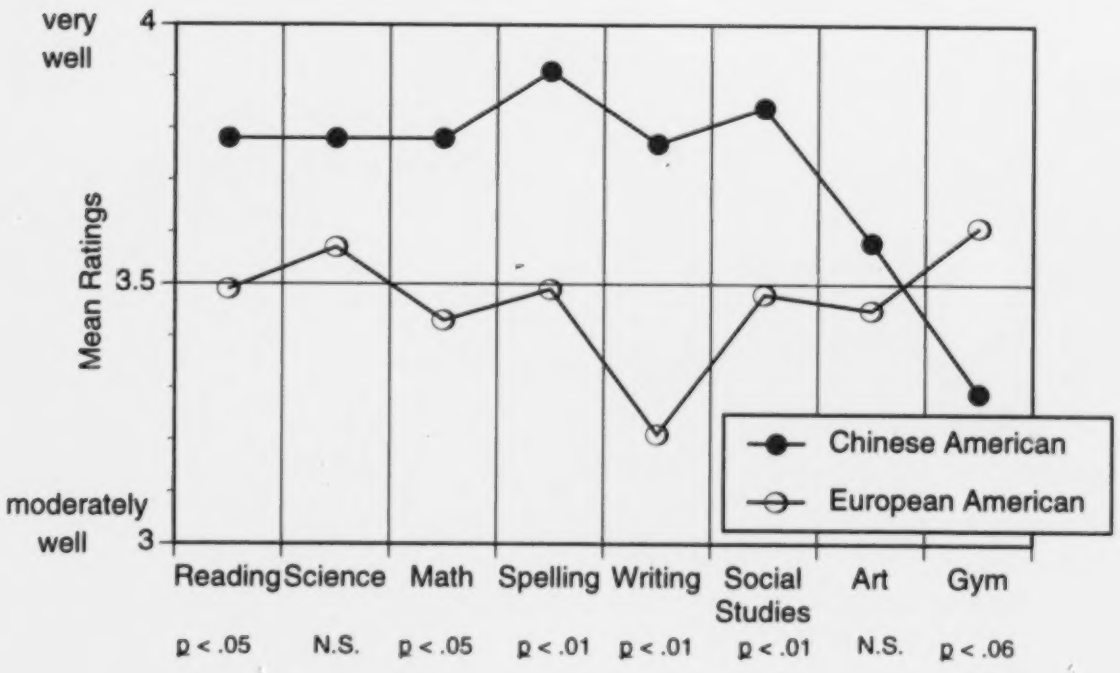
Prediction of Children's School Performance and Liking of School from Parents' Involvement

Child Outcome	Predictors	R^2 Change	β	p
School Performance Rating	School activity involvement	.37**	.21	.174
		.11	**-.08**	.656
	Personal involvement		.30	.056
			.01	.935
	Cognitive-intellectual involvement		.47	.004
			.32	.066
Liking of School Subjects	School activity involvement	.08	-.15	.436
		.25*	**.49**	.003
	Personal involvement		.23	.219
			-.12	.449
	Cognitive-intellectual involvement		.14	.453
			-.01	.943

Notes. Chinese American correlations are in regular type; European American correlations are in bold type. R^2 change, betas and p values are from the final regression equation. N = 73.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Cultural Differences in Teachers' Ratings of Children's School Performance



Cultural Differences in Maternal and Paternal Acceptance